

~~(FINAL REVISED DRAFT (version 6) for the purpose of discussion, 11-15-23)~~

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## **New Fairfield Board of Finance Public Comment Policy**

Under Connecticut state law, municipal boards and commissions are public agencies under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and therefore must comply with FOIA requirements. Along with other factors, this means that local board and commission meetings must be open to the public, except for closed sessions, as allowed by law, for specified purposes.

FOIA does not explicitly require meetings to allow for public participation. The State's Freedom of Information Commission (FOIC) has consistently held that this decision is within the discretion of each agency. However, the Commission endorses public participation at agency meetings, to whatever extent it is possible. (See Advisory Opinion #35 (1978) and Final Decision, Docket #FIC 2009-254 (2010)).

Additionally, The Commission believes that it is within the spirit of the Freedom of Information Act for public agencies to be open to the expressed concerns and opinions of their constituents, as well as, providing the disclosure of their records and public access to their meetings. (<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2017/rpt/pdf/2017-R-0232.pdf>).

It is a core democratic value that everyone has a right to express their opinions and views, and for these views to be heard. The purpose of the public comment period is to inform the board and committees of the views of the public. Public comments are encouraged. Elected officials are to be open to hearing these views and to considering them, as well as other factors during board deliberations.

Public comment does not necessarily warrant a reply since it is to provide information to the board or committee. However, if the Chairperson, or board member, deems an immediate reply is in order, the Chairperson, or board

member, may reply, or the Chairperson may select an appropriate board member or personnel, who is present, to reply.

For the entire meeting agenda to proceed on schedule and to accomplish the purpose of the meeting, the board by majority vote ~~(vote 11/16/22, motion is at 1:00 mark on recorded tape)~~ reserves the right to limit the duration of public comment.

#### Public Comment Period

The board strives to create a culture of tolerance for differing points of view that credits everyone with having the best interests of the community in mind. It is hoped that the public's comments will assist the board in focusing on the strength and weakness of proposed solutions to community problems and issues.

The board members are also expected to always treat other board members with courtesy and respect, and in a manner deemed appropriate to conduct the commission's business and to comply with the statutes governing Connecticut municipalities.

All participants will ~~be shall~~ be treated with respect and courtesy. It is important that the public feel that the board meetings will be conducted in an orderly way, and that the public's views can be expressed to the board and committees, without fear of inappropriate recrimination, criticism, ~~intimidation~~intimidation, or comment by the board members or other ~~participants~~participants.

The manner of speech in meetings is important. Participants will be encouraged to refrain from overly aggressive or defamatory personal attacks and ridicule, which can be perceived to be questioning the integrity and motives of board members, employees, presenters, and other public participants. Incivility such as making attempts to drown out other's perspectives in an aggressive, slanderous, and/or physically intimidating manner will be noted and discouraged. The Chairperson may, or on the motion of another board member, rule any public speaker out of order, should his/her comments be considered personal, ~~rude~~rude, or slanderous, and that person does not adjust their tone after warnings of the board.

The ~~b~~Board currently has two (2) public comment sessions. The first session is allotted 45 ~~minutes~~minutes, and the second session is allotted 15 minutes.

Members of the public who wish to speak are allotted three (3) minutes time or less, depending on the number of requests and the time available. The Chairman may also exercise discretion to increase or decrease the three (3) minute limit for a given speaker, depending on the circumstances.

The board requests that the public refrain from repeating their own same comments at a given meeting or at multiple meetings. All comments will be noted at the time they are expressed to the board or committee members.

If your views have already been expressed during the public comment period, it is suggested that you may simply indicate that you agree with the previous speaker.

A spokesperson may present the views of a given group.

#### **Public Comment Procedures**

- Requesting to speak at in-person meetings: People requesting to speak in an in-person meeting are requested to give their name or organization before speaking.

The Board of Finance currently meets regularly, once a month, on Wednesdays at 7:30 PM. The schedule and agendas for all these meetings can be found on the town website at [newfairfield.org](http://newfairfield.org).

- Requesting to speak at Zoom meetings: The procedures will be announced at the beginning of the meeting.
- The zoom link is listed on the agenda for each meeting, which can be found at the town website at [newfairfield.org](http://newfairfield.org).
- Submitting written comments: Members of the public may ~~submit~~submit comments and questions in writing to the board

by email at [BOF@newfairfield.org](mailto:BOF@newfairfield.org).

The public is also free to use other means of communication to voice their opinions (e.g., social media, local newspapers).

The mailing address for other letter correspondence is Board of Finance, 4 Brush Hill Road, New Fairfield, CT 06812.

These emails and letters will be forwarded to every member of the Board of Finance and ~~are~~ acknowledged at the next scheduled board meeting.

(Revised 11/15~~2~~/2023)

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